

OCFA AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE



Photos by Elliot Ferguson

TOP CONTENDERS: Holbrook resident Jan Veldhuizen of Botanix Oxford Instashade Inc., left, and Burgessville's Leigh Cohoe are nominated in the conservation category of the Oxford County Federation of Agriculture's 2006 Awards of Excellence.

Botanix, Cohoes nominated for conservation commitment

By Hugo Rodrigues
AGRICULTURE REPORTER

WOODSTOCK — It's not about the recognition, it's because it's the right thing to do, say the conservation finalists for the Oxford County Federation of Agriculture Awards of Excellence.

Nominated for the award this year are Botanix Oxford Instashade Inc., just north of Holbrook, and Burgessville-area farmers Leigh and Bonnie Cohoe.

At Botanix, owners Jan and Susannah Veldhuizen are being recognized, in part, for the drip irrigation system they use in the tree nursery.

"It's one of those things ... we don't do it to get a feather in our cap," Jan Veldhuizen said. "We do it because we need to and it's the best for the environment."

"Someone obviously has seen us do this and nominated us."

Veldhuizen explained the drip irrigation method of watering their young trees was a necessary step since the business operates off one private well on its property.



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Category: Conservation
Finalists: Botanix Oxford Instashade Inc., Holbrook; Leigh and Bonnie Cohoe, Burgessville

"When you're only on one well, you have to watch how much water you waste."

Instead of spraying water over the nursery, hoses are run wherever possible through the trees and plants, watering them where they need it most and using every drop as efficiently as possible. Veldhuizen compared it to spray irrigation, where 20 per cent might evaporate, 30 per cent might become runoff and only 20 per cent reaches the plant.

"With drip irrigation, every drop pulled out of the well is used," he said. "We probably use it on about 80 per cent of our product."

The Cohoes, whose farm isn't too far from Botanix, are best

recognized in this county for the work they have done on and off their farm in promoting environmental farm practices.

On taking over their farm, the couple gradually moved to no-till methods for several reasons, Leigh Cohoe said. No-till is the practice where the land isn't plowed or worked over in the fall or spring to prepare for the next crop.

"It really fit in with the soil type ... so we worked it out bit-by-bit and it fell into place," Cohoe said.

They were one of the first farms in Oxford to move to this method of farming. Over the years, they have also incorporated other ecological features into their farm, such as wind-

breaks and buffer strips.

"A windbreak can help what you grow," Cohoe said, "but some farmers will say it decreases your yields. Next to the windbreak it does, but 500 feet beyond it, the farm is more productive."

Cohoe is also widely known for the Ontario Environmental Farm Plan that was initiated in the 1990s, and is still involved with its successor that's now currently underway, the Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan. Cohoe has led sessions on the programs that allow interested farmers to qualify for government assistance towards environmental projects on their farms.

"I'm proud we've been able to maintain the quality of the rural experience," he said.

This is the seventh of an eight-week series on the finalists in the sixth annual Oxford County Federation of Agriculture Awards of Excellence. The awards will be handed out on April 6 at the Oxford Auditorium in Woodstock.